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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7857
INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 2117
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0056
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 4101
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1242
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2017
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6949
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8035
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5341
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0595
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2850
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9865
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0906
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 3257
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5234
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1794
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3638
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0077
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2047
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001280

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2017

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PHUM PREL PK

SUBJECT: CHIEF JUSTICE CONTROVERSY: JUSTICES RESIGN,
MUSHARRAF REASSURES, PARLIAMENTARIANS REQUISITION

REF: ISLAMABAD 1267 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Pakistan's press and elite continue to focus on the controversy over Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry's suspension. As of mid-afternoon March 20, the following occurred:

- There were no reports of large-scale demonstrations in any of Pakistan's cities on March 20.
- On March 20, Naseer Saeed Sheikh, one of several Deputy Attorney Generals, resigned.
- The government announced that the March 21 session of the Supreme Judicial Council would be postponed until April 3 -- after Justice Rana Bhagwandas takes the oath as acting Chief Justice. This will allow the government more time to let the situation settle down.
- On March 20, Inspector Khalid Mehmood was arrested in connection with his role in the police raid on Geo television. (Note: Mehmood was reportedly the officer in charge at the time of the raid. End Note.)
- So far, nine justices, including Lahore High Court justice Jawad S. Khawaja, have resigned their posts. Khawaja told reporters that his resignation was a response to police excesses during protests against the Government's handling of the reference against Justice Chaudhry. Others, including First Class Magistrate Rajesh Chandar Rajput (whose brother-in-law happens to be the son of soon-to-be Acting Chief Justice Rana Bhagwandas) said his resignation was in protest against the maltreatment and forced leave of Chief Justice Chaudhry.

- Late March 19, President Musharraf appeared for an interview on Geo television. Musharraf assured viewers that he would not declare a state of emergency and that general elections will be held on time. He also discussed his positions on press freedom (he supports it), the police attack on the Geo office (investigations are underway); and the right to protest (everyone has the right to protest, but "political elements" should not become involved).

- Opposition members in the National Assembly are filing a requisition to hold a special session of Parliament. Although the National Assembly is scheduled to hold its next session on March 26, opposition sources hypothesized that the government might delay the session because of the judicial controversy. (Note: A requisition, when appropriately filed, compels the Speaker to summon the National Assembly within 14 days of receipt. End Note.)

- Acting Chief Justice Javed Iqbal ordered Attorney General Makhdoom Ali Khan to appear before the Supreme Court to provide testimony about the police manhandling of Justice Chaudhry. (Note: On March 20, Deputy Attorney General Raja Irshad appeared instead. End Note.)

- The blame game is in full swing. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, Constitutional Advisor Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, and Law Minister Wasi Zaffar have been singled out so far for supposedly recommending action against Justice Chaudhry in the first place.

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- Pakistan's capital was buffeted with unseasonably heavy rains on March 19 and early March 20. Weather forecasts for March 21 -- the planned day for the nationwide wheeljam protest -- also predict a chance of rain, which may affect turnout.

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